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SUBJECT: GAZA CONTACTS DESCRIBE DETERIORATING CONDITIONS
AND DWINDLING RESOURCES

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Contacts report that aerial bombardment lessened overnight on January 6 in Gaza city, but intensified in south and central Gaza. Gaza contacts also reported a worsening humanitarian situation, with displaced persons crammed into UNRWA shelters and lengthening bread lines. They expressed hope that a short-term humanitarian "pause" could be extended. End Summary.

FEAR AS BOMBING INTENSIFIES

¶2. (C) Contacts in Gaza City report January 6 was quieter than the night before and "allowed our children to sleep." Contacts in southern and central Gaza said airstrikes continued in their areas unabated. Eman al-Bayyuk, who works for a youth NGO, reported to PDOFF that there was intense bombing near her house in the southern Gazan city of Khan Yunis during the night. She said that many people, including her cousins, had fled the outskirts of Khan Yunis after they received phone messages from the IDF telling them to evacuate their homes and head for the town center.

¶3. (C) Kamal Abu Shamala, a former PD exchange grantee and director of the UNRWA school in Nussayrat refugee camp in central Gaza, told PDOFF that the worst bombing yet occurred in Nussayrat on January 6, with IDF strikes on several houses in his neighborhood. Shrapnel from one missile landed just outside his house. "Nothing is safe here," remarked Abu Shamala: "No tree. No stone. No child."

SAMARITAN ACTS TEMPER FOOD/WATER SHORTAGE

¶4. (C) Contacts reported widespread shortages of food and water, especially among the displaced. Abu Hashim, a wealthy Gazan businessman, told EconFSN that he went to visit an UNRWA school in Al-Shati refugee camp on January 6, and found over 750 displaced persons seeking shelter in the compound. Many of them were hungry and had not eaten for some time. Abu Hashim purchased large quantities of rice and tomato paste and some ground beef providing a meal for all 750 people. "Maybe it didn't taste so good," he said, "but it was a meal."

¶5. (C) A health officer at the Al-Shati UNRWA clinic told USAID FSN that people have been coming to the clinic to get water and to use the generator to charge their cell phones. A contact in Burayj refugee camp told USAID FSN that dozens of families have been bringing their unbaked bread to a local mosque. They also carry with them electrical ovens, and, as soon as the mosque powers up its generator, the imam lets them use the power to bake their bread. Likewise, the mayor of El Zahra City, Dr. Tarik Hiju, told USAID FSN that the city is allowing families to bake bread at the water pumping station when they operate the one generator.

¶6. (C) Bayyuk noted to PDOFF that the food shortage in Khan Younis is growing more and more acute, with bread lines as long as eight hours outside bakeries. She said that families

were strategizing in order to buy bread: "They go right after dawn prayer, and then several members of the same family get in line, so they can each get a bundle of bread."

CRAMPED QUARTERS IN UNRWA SHELTERS/SHIFA HOSPITAL

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17. (C) Contacts described a dire situation at several UNRWA facilities sheltering families displaced by the IDF offensive. Abu Shamala told PDOFF that there are five UNRWA centers in Nussayrat, each sheltering between 600 to 800 displaced persons. In his school, people are sleeping thirty to a classroom. Abu Shamala said most had come from the border area with Israel. "Either their houses were destroyed," Abu Shamala said, "or they got a phone call from the IDF telling them to leave."

18. (C) American Corner Gaza Director and al-Azhar University professor Dr. Awni Karzon told PDOFF that he considered moving his family to an UNRWA shelter, and went to visit the Al-Shati UNRWA school on January 7 for that purpose, but he said the people there were living in "miserable conditions", without enough blankets and with very little food. UNRWA/Gaza Deputy Director Sebastian Trives reports that UNRWA was able to distribute food and water to all of its shelters, including ones that had no access for 2-3 days as they were behind IDF front lines. UNRWA, however, has been able to distribute blankets and mattresses to only 70 percent of the shelters.

19. (C) Bassam Naser, a USAID sub-contractor, told USAID FSN that his wife works as a nurse in the Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, and that the hospital is in "complete chaos," with thousands of patients and lacking any semblance of proper order. Many displaced people are sleeping in the hospital corridors and backyard, according to Naser. Yehia Idris, a MEPI grant recipient and manager of the Basma Society, which promotes peaceful expression and reconciliation, told PDOFF that doctors from nearby Shifa hospital often come over between shifts just to rest. "What they say is beyond belief," Idris said: "He says there are almost all civilians at the hospital. Children. Women. They are not Hamas fighters."

GRATEFUL FOR A SHORT CEASE-FIRE

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110. (C) Many ConGen contacts expressed hope that a three-hour "humanitarian pause" on January 7 would grant them some temporary relief. All said they wish it could be extended for a longer term. Dr. Karzon said that the humanitarian situation remains dire for him and his family, who are staying at a friend's apartment in Gaza City along with four other families. There is still no water, electricity, or cooking gas, and food supplies are dwindling for the more than twenty people under one roof. Karzon was grateful for the pause, which allowed him to go out and search for food in the shops and return to his partially-destroyed home to retrieve canned food and baby formula for his one-year old.

"I CANNOT WORK ON PEACE IN THE FUTURE"

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111. (C) ConGen contacts shared a mounting despair over the prospects of a peaceful future, whether in the near or long term. When asked what this conflict would mean for his work to spread the messages of peaceful expression and reconciliation within Gazan society, Idris replied, "This is a mad war. It is deepening the culture of violence in this society. I cannot work on peace in the future."

WALLES